

The perfin of the Romanian newspaper

"The Universal"

by Dr. Tam Llewellyn-Edwards

One of the most common Romanian perfins is the "U" of the Bucharest newspaper "The Universal." This perfin also has one of the longest Romanian periods of usage. As an "E" rated perfin, examples can be found in all collections that cover this region. Nevertheless, it is worthy of study and once investigated it proves to be a very interesting perfin. The methods used in this study are applicable to any perfin and are a way of making a worthwhile study and display based on any common perfin.

The Romanian postal authorities agreed to the use of perfins in 1891 and they were permitted from 1st January 1892. "The Universal" must have been amongst the earliest Romanian organisations to use perfins. Its perfin is common on the 1890 definitive issue (Scott #94 *et seq*). I have three examples with postmarks dated 1892 in my collection. My earliest is dated 7th September 1892 and my latest postmarked example is in 1945.

If a large number of these perfins are arranged in date order, two factors emerge: all the early ones have large holes while all the later ones have small holes; and damaged strikes on the die are common—in fact they are the norm. The difference in hole size suggests two different perfin dies (Figure 1). However, the designs are otherwise identical and common cataloguing practice is not to record variations in hole size, so both these dies have the same catalogue number. As we shall see later they are probably quite different dies.

From an investigation of postmarked examples, the date of the first damage to the dies can be pinpointed. I have a perfect strike of this perfin on Scott #105 dated 20th April 1894 and a strike missing the lower three pins (Figure 2) on Scott #120 postmarked 13th August 1894. The latter has its pins actually missing, rather than just blind. So, sometime in mid 1894 the perfin machine was badly damaged and not repaired. From 1894 the damage becomes progressively worse and by 1896 we find examples with only the twelve upper pins remaining resulting in a perfin which could be mistaken as a new die "TT" (Figure 3). Then by 1899 the die only had eight pins intact (Figure 4).

My collection contains one anomaly in this sequence. This is a stamp postmarked 1899 with a full strike, but with the lower three holes blind rather than missing. This may be the result of a repair on the dies at the end of the century, but as the stamp is Scott #108 (which was issued in 1891 and superseded by Scott #118 in 1893) it could be an example of the use of old stock which had been perfined in 1894 at the time the perfin machine was damaged and kept in reserve. Does anyone have any blind hole examples (as opposed to missing hole examples) or any dated examples which could clarify this matter?

The new (small hole) die seems to have come into use in the first decade of the new century. The latest example of the large hole die I have is 1897 (except for the one mentioned above) and the earliest small hole postmarked example I have is dated

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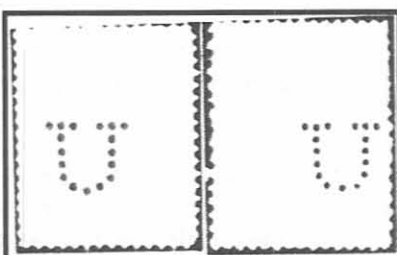


Figure 1. There are two varieties of the U pattern, one with large holes; the other with small holes.



Figure 2. The first damage to the die apparently occurred in 1894.

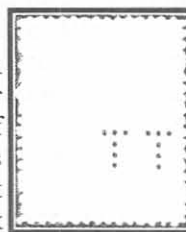


Figure 3. By 1896, so many holes were missing that the result could be mistaken for a different pattern.

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1913—although I do have examples of the small hole type on Scott #207 *et seq* which were introduced from 1908.

The small hole die has another surprise for the collector. By 1937 more damage had occurred, but damaged stamps are to be found in the same date range as undamaged ones. This suggests a multiple-die perforating machine which is unusual for Romanian perfins.

The advent of the wide use of large format stamps in Romania in the 1930's provides the collector with examples of stamps with more than one strike of the perfin, and by examining a number of these (together with a small number of horizontal pairs) it became clear that the small hole die is from a double die machine (Figure 5). It is always worth searching for extra holes away from the catalogued perfin design, even on small format stamps.

The double die has yet another surprise for us.

Close inspection of Figure 5 will show that it has a horizontal pitch of 20mm. "So what?" you might say. In the 1900s when the new perfin machine was presumably made, the horizontal pitch of Romanian stamps was 22mm--so why construct a machine with a different pitch to the stamps it was intended to perfin? However, in the 1890s, when the original machine was constructed, the horizontal pitch of Romanian stamps was 20mm.

Was the original machine a double die machine supplied with new heads in the 1900's?

Can anyone's collection throw light on this?



Figure 4. By 1899, only eight pins were left in the original perforator.

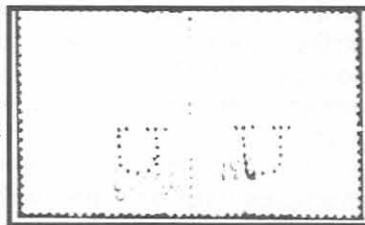


Figure 5. The new small-hole perforator which came into use early in the 20th century was apparently a multiple-die machine.

The author is setting up an International Romanian Perfin Study Circle and anyone who is interested in joining—there is no fee—or who just has information to add is welcome to contact him. He is also working on an update of the Romanian Perfin Catalogue and would also welcome details of new designs or corrections/additions for this project.

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